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# Helping Families In Food, Nutrition, and Health Help Themselves

United States Department of Agriculture • Home Economics and Human Nutrition • Extension Service

## The Issues

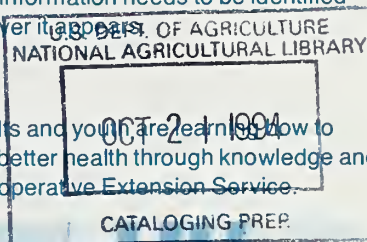
- A 1982 Gallup Poll reports 81 percent of Americans felt that good physical health was second only to having a good family life. Educators need to continue to address this concern.
- The most significant health problems of Americans today are chronic diseases such as cancer, hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease. Several research studies indicate that a close relationship exists between diet, exercise, and health status.
- Yankelovich research shows that 72 percent of Americans have made lifestyle changes as a result of the economy. Sixty-four percent have changed the food they serve and eat. As diets change, nutrition education needs and practices need to be evaluated.
- People must gain critical knowledge and skills to establish dietary habits and exercise regularly for optimum health.
- Families need adequate and wholesome food. Education

must address factors such as income, attitudes, lifestyles, education, and food economics which play key roles in food selection and meal-planning decisions.

- Many families need money management skills combined with sound nutrition principles to improve their diets.
- Over 60 percent of American households practice one or more methods of food preservation. New, applied research is needed in the areas of food preservation and food safety.
- More facts are needed in the relationship between food intake and drugs.
- Food and nutrition misinformation needs to be identified and challenged wherever it appears.

## The Resources

More than 80 million adults and youth are learning how to achieve better diets and better health through knowledge and skills gained from the Cooperative Extension Service.





## Helping Families Help Themselves In Food, Nutrition, and Health



The Cooperative Extension Service has been in operation for over 70 years, since the Smith-Lever Act was passed in 1914. It is cooperatively funded, administered, and managed by local, state, and federal governments. The federal partner (USDA) is linked to state land-grant universities to support the educational outreach programs of 17,000 county and city professional Cooperative Extension Service personnel. The idea is to take research-based findings and translate this into practical applications for families in rural, suburban, and urban homes.

Cooperative Extension Service education is available in 3,150 counties (and many cities) throughout the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, Micronesia, and American Samoa. In most of these offices, at least one Extension home economist, and in large counties, sometimes two or three, provide objective, research-based family living information from USDA, state land-grant universities, and other sources.

There are 4,000 Extension home economists at the local level. Over a million Extension homemakers and other volunteers assist local CES staff with educational program outreach to families and youth. They reach an additional 100 million contacts for the Cooperative Extension Service.

Approximately 5,000 paraprofessional aides are employed in Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). These aides teach low-income homemakers, as individuals and in small groups, the importance of nutrition and how to improve their families' diets with available resources. Since FY 1968 over 2 million homemakers have been enrolled in the program. Last year, more than 57,000 volunteers (including many graduated homemakers) helped extend this teaching to homemakers and youth.



EFNEP also teaches nutrition and related skills to 4-H youth to increase the adequacy of their diets. Youth receive nutrition information targeted to age groups. At present, 5,528,019 boys and girls have participated in the 4-H EFNEP youth program.

### The Results

Extension's new, computerized reporting system called "NARS" (National Annual Reporting System)\* shows, in 1981, that food preservation/safety, nutrition, and food economics were major educational areas in state programs. In health and safety programs, education addressing health promotion, wellness, and fitness were given priority. (See diagram above. *Mass media contacts are not included.*)

Here are some examples of state programs:

- Over 650 participants from three Connecticut counties were recently reached with in-depth, dietary information. In





a followup evaluation, all those reporting said they changed one or more food practices. They shared the information with a total of 415 other people. Ninety percent checked labels for fat, sugar, and sodium content more often; 95 percent increased use of fish, chicken and legumes while decreasing fat intake. Eighty percent increased their daily physical activity. Over 75 percent were adjusting recipes more often to reduce calories; 65 percent were choosing lower calorie dairy and meat products.

- A survey shows that more than 70,000 Arkansas home food buyers read a weekly food column in the *Arkansas Gazette* written by an Extension food marketing specialist. Seventy-one percent reported they were able to better stretch food money because of the information provided; 82 percent improved the variety of foods in their diets.
- A "Blue Ribbon Babies Through Better Nutrition" letter series program, in 3 years, reached over 5,000 West Virginia pregnant women. Over 80 percent of those report-

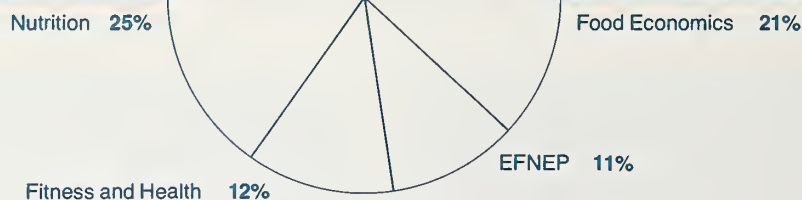


ing said they had no previous contact with Extension. Of these, 61 percent reported they were drinking more milk; 11 percent reported they were eating liver two or more times a week; 36 percent were eating a dark green or deep yellow vegetable daily; and 47 percent cut down on carbonated drinks. An additional 49 percent reduced intake of candy and other sweets.

- Fifty-eight percent of 420 Idaho EFNEP-enrolled homemakers improved their diets in 6 months. Twenty percent increased their milk consumption and 30 percent increased their fruit and vegetable consumption to four or more servings per day.
- South Carolina's 1890 college reported that nearly 500 rural homemakers were taught nutrition by eight para-professional aides and 10 volunteers. Dietary and food behavior changes were measured by food recalls. Twenty-three percent improved their diets; 28 percent planted gardens and preserved food to realize an average savings of \$25.89 per month on their grocery bills.
- 142 Oregon "master food preservers" (volunteers who teach others) in 11 counties answered 16,000 questions by phone or mail. They also did food preservation demonstrations. Estimated value of volunteer time: \$35,000.



*Distribution of Food, Nutrition,  
and Health Programs by Percent  
of Reported Participants*



(Represents 699,940 Participants; 1657.6 professional FTE's and 50 states, Guam, Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico)

- All 77 Oklahoma counties recently conducted programs emphasizing health and the quality of life, reaching 59,482 men and women. Approximately 1,378 families later reported they had yearly physical checkups; 2,818 men and women had their blood pressures checked. Over 38,000 people were reached with drug and food interaction information through leader-delivered lessons, teleconferences, and other methods. Over 14,000 people asked for dietary and special diet information at county and health fairs. Weight control program participants lost an average of 12.5 pounds each. Homemakers are saving \$5 to \$40 per month on money no longer wasted on food supplements.
- Over 2,000 Arizona EFNEP homemakers and 6,407 youth were taught by 20 paraprofessionals and 490 volunteers. After being in the program 1 year, homemakers who reported they had no servings from the milk group dropped from 45 to 14 percent. Sixty-nine percent of enrolled homemakers were under age 35. Most children of enrolled families were under 8 years old. Volunteers contributed a total of 7,468 hours, conservatively valued at \$38,000. Of the 2,199 enrolled homemakers, 25 percent graduated from the program in 1 year.
- Alabama Cooperative Extension Service assisted in the USDA surplus cheese distribution to low-income families. Extension specialists provided a new publication on storage and uses of cheese to assist the program. Over 100,000 copies were distributed by field staff, 500 volunteers, and EFNEP homemakers who were trained to demonstrate ways to use and store cheese. They reached almost 52,000 individuals with information.
- Pilot project funding from ES-USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services, supplemented with funds from the University of Nevada School of Medical Sciences, resulted in the establishment of six home aid stations operated by emergency medical technicians. Besides providing emergency medical treatment which is known to have saved one life, these technicians worked with Nevada's Extension health specialist to develop home study materials so that Nevadans would assume more responsibility for their own health. In a 2-year period, over 1,000 people acquired knowledge and made changes that will reduce stress, lower blood pressure, help them lose weight, reduce depression, and prevent accidents.
- Cooperative Extension Service health programs recently helped 233,023 Texans get the most services for their health care dollars. Thirty-nine health fairs and 16 screening clinics were held. Self-help skills such as first aid, home

nursing, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, etc., were taught. Over 120,000 publications and 61,785 newsletters and other mail-out materials were distributed. Over 1,200 seminars, clinics, and workshops were held.

For more information on the Cooperative Extension Service food, nutrition, and health programs and results in your state, contact the State Leader of Home Economics at your state land-grant university. For national information, contact Home Economics and Human Nutrition, Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.







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